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KGB spares no effort in eavesdropping

INTERCEPT

Editor's Note: This story is based on an exclusive three-hour interview given The Bulletin by the highest-ranking Soviet diplomat ever to defect to the U.S.

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GLEN COVE, LONG ISLAND — In the late 1950s nobody in this sleepy little town had any idea there was anything unusual going on in the attic of the Soviet U.N. delegation's big mansion tucked away on a hilltop off quiet, tree-lined Dosoris Lane.

At that time, Soviet interception of U.S. East Coast phone calls from the attic was just a shoestring operation.

In 1958, 28-year-old Soviet diplomat Arkady Nikolayevich Shevchenko happened to spend three months living at the mansion in connection with his participation in disarmament negotiations at the U.N.

He and others associated with the Soviet Mission to the U.N. shared the sprawling three-story mansion and spacious grounds and gardens with a couple of technicians who never said anything about what they were doing.

Upstairs to nowhere

Shevchenko was curious about why the technicians were so taciturn, and why every day they would disappear up the stairs into the off-limits part of the attic penthouse.

"Already at that time there were a few people whom we immediately spotted, all of us," Shevchenko says.

"They didn't belong actually either to the mission or to the security officers who

follow you or guard the mission or to any kind of management concerning the building or anything like that," he said.

"We even shared the same big kitchens when we cooked in there, and these people, they wouldn't talk."

"There were at that time two or three, and they were just technicians, radio technicians, electronics."

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He could see — and his contact with high Politburo and KGB officials confirmed what he saw — that by 1978, the KGB's mini-eavesdropping station had grown to massive proportions.

Didn't live in a vacuum

"By that time I had a lot of information about the KGB activities. I never had been KGB, but we did not live and work in a vacuum."

"They discussed with me a number of things. I was aware, I knew their personnel."

"There were more than a dozen people, professionals of the department of the KGB that is in charge of technical spying."

In April 1978, Shevchenko left his quarters here, broke with the Soviet government, quit as Under Secretary General of the U.N., and defected to the U.S.

By the time he left, the off-limits area in the mansion had been expanded to the entire attic, and outside to a huge locked greenhouse.

20 years of progress

Between 1958 and 1978, tons of electronic equipment had been flown to New York from Moscow and then trucked to Glen Cove, and the radio/electronic technician force that regularly disappeared up the attic stairs had added another dozen people to cope with the increased activity.

In the intervening 20 years, U.S. phone companies increasingly elected to bypass

CIA